

## **North East 'has most mental health problems'**

Mental health problems are more common in the North East than anywhere else in the country, according to a report published today (Jun 19).

Figures used to estimate likely rates suggest the region has higher than the national average of both common conditions and severe illness.

The statistics appear in a report about mental health produced by the Association of Public Health Observatories.

Commissioned by the Government's Chief Medical Officer Sir Liam Donaldson, it is the seventh in a series called *Indicators of Public Health in the English Regions*.

Professor John Wilkinson is director of the North East Public Health Observatory, which was responsible for compiling the report.

He said: "Readers will be struck by the range and nature of the indicators we have used - this reflects the complexity of the subject and also the wide range of determinants of good mental health.

"We highlight some important differences between regions. However, some of the usual patterns which are frequently seen when making physical health comparisons are very different in mental health.

"At the moment, mortality data provide one of the few ways of making any informed comparisons. Suicide is commonly used, but we know that there are very different approaches in European countries which make comparisons difficult."

The North East has the highest age standardised death rates from suicide and injuries of undetermined intent in both males and females aged 15 and over. The rate for males (20.4 per 100,000) is significantly higher than the England average (16.4 per 100,000).

The region also has the highest age standardised rates of hospital admission for self-harm and for drug overdose. Rates were significantly higher than the England average.

Evidence suggests an association between increased alcohol consumption and mental ill health. Data from the General Household Survey shows that the North East (32.3%) has higher than the England average (26.8%) level of alcohol consumption above recommended daily limits.

Nutrition is also thought to have an important part to play in mental health. Using the proportion of adults eating the recommended five or more portions of fruit and vegetables per day as a measure of general quality of the diet, data from the Health Survey for England shows that the North East has the lowest level of healthy eating of the English regions (16.8% compared to 23.8% for England).

The association between rates of mental illness and population characteristics such as poverty, unemployment and social isolation is well established.

Education also has an impact and the North East has a significantly lower than average number of teenagers attaining at least five good grades at GCSE or equivalent.

The high demand for mental health services in the region appears to be matched with high levels of provision including:

- the highest rates of the population receiving care through assertive outreach, crisis resolution services, and psychosis early intervention
- significantly higher than England average age standardised rates of hospital admission for depression (78.2 per 100,000 compared to 69.0 per 100,000) and for anxiety disorder (86.1 per 100,000 compared to 72.3 per 100,000)

In addition, the North East has high rates of prescribing in primary care of medications for the treatment of depression, anxiety and psychoses.

Prof Wilkinson added: "Work needs to be undertaken to develop suitable mental health indicators which can be used as part of the Local Area Agreement process. Initially sub-regional analysis needs to be undertaken in order to gain better understanding of the local position.

"There is also an urgent need to develop new indicators of mental health to enable countries of Europe to be compared."

Dr Stephen Singleton, regional director of public health for the North East, said: "I hope that local leaders in the NHS, councils and all regional partnerships will use this resource and support the work needed to improve the mental health of our population."

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*Note to editors: Further detail about the report can be obtained from John Wilkinson or David Chappel at North East Public Health Observatory on 0191 334 0398.*

### **Related online resources**

1. The national report 'Indications of Public Health in the English Regions, 7: Mental Health' and the associated regional data can be downloaded from:  
<http://www.nepho.org.uk>
2. The national Mental Health Observatory website contains a range of resources about Mental Health and can be accessed at:  
<http://www.mentalhealthobservatory.org.uk>

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